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Focused Engagement:
A New Military Strategy
for
Winning the Old Great Game

by

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America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principle. We as a people have such a purpose today. It is to make kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world.

President George Bush, 1989 Inaugural

The "Great Game" Is Still Afoot

In the era of the two Afghan Wars, the Imperial Russian Czar and Queen Victoria's renowned statesmen openly vied for access, influence, and advantage in the geostrategic ring. They called their bareknuckled battle the "Great Game." Today, over a hundred years later, the modern-day heirs of these two 19th Century heavyweights have just concluded yet another round in the "Great Game." This political, economic, military, and ideological imbroglio had pitted pluralism against totalitarianism, capitalism against command economics, containment against adventurism, and democracy against communism. After a 45-year "round" of toe-to-toe fisticuffs including its own Afghan War, the United States has not only succeeded in wearing out its Soviet rival but also in scoring a virtual Cold War knockout.

Ironically, even as America lifts its arms in triumph, it finds itself besieged by its own erstwhile fans -- old supporters who would now have the victorious superpower

retire from the "Great Game," a competition they deem as totally anachronistic. Today, legions of pundits from across the political spectrum are heralding not only the end of the Cold War but also the "end of history." They foresee the coming of a new age in which the time-honored concept of the balance of power and the utility of military might will have little, if any, applicability. Animated by the conflicting passions of unrestrained euphoria and an overwrought sense of American economic decline, they clamor for strategic retrenchment and domestic immersion. They yearn for a simpler, safer world in which America can go about its business free of entangling alliances and troublesome dependencies.

But, as events in the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf have demonstrated, the pundits' isolationist dreams will not come true. The abiding truth of the post-containment era is crystal clear: The "Great Game" is still afoot, and by virtual default the United States is its foremost pugilist. If America and the other states of the global community are to prosper in the days and decades ahead, the U.S. must develop a national security strategy which will sustain its winning streak in the competition for global advantage.

This paper explores the military dimension of one possible "Great Game" plan for the post-Cold War era -- President Bush's vision of a "New World Order." It outlines

a proposal for a new American military strategy -- one which focuses our constrained resources and exploits innovative concepts to produce a constellation of strategically and operationally ready, responsive, and resilient unified commands engaged in meeting the complex challenges to our national interests. In short, this essay proposes a new military approach -- a strategy of "Focused Engagement."

A "New World Order" National Security Strategy

To fulfill its critical role in the realization of our timeless interests, America's military strategy for the 1990s and beyond must support the nation's larger national security strategy. Although the particulars of this grand diplomatic, economic, and military approach are far from clear, its general parameters are taking shape. In his August 1990 address to the Aspen Institute and his recent "State of the Union" message, President George Bush sketched out a blueprint for a new national security strategy supportive of his vision of a "New World Order." This strategy appears to have five major components:

- * To ensure the survival of the United States and its allies through the maintenance of balanced, interoperable, ready military forces capable of deterring aggression and, if necessary, responding flexibly and successfully to defend our vital interests and, in concert with multinational organizations, the universal rule of law.

* To shape a safer world by fostering that global stability necessary for evolutionary, positive change -- an environment attained through the negotiation of regional arms control and security accords as well as the expansion of political pluralism and participation.

* To promote domestic and international economic growth through sound fiscal policy; a reliance on unimpeded, free markets; and the liberalization of global trade.

* To project American values worldwide through an emphasis on human rights and the creation of a revitalized American "City on the Hill."

* To preserve traditional American values through programs and policies supportive^{of} individual fulfillment and the re-emergence of the American family.

These ambitious goals and concepts have significant implications for those charged with the development of America's military strategy. As columnist Charles Krauthammer has pointed out, they underscore the sweeping responsibility of the United States in an era in which bipolarity has given way to unipolarity. They demand artful American management in an environment of unavoidable austerity and risks. And they recommend the development of

a smaller, modernized American military which can deal with the entire spectrum of conflict. But most significantly for America's strategists, they provide the guidance necessary to define those military objectives which must logically stand at the heart of the nation's military strategy.

The Objectives of "Focused Engagement"

What are those critical military objectives? An analysis of the explicit and implicit "New World Order" tasks suggests that tomorrow's American military must be able to:

- * Deter nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) attack from any quarter while simultaneously pursuing a dramatic reduction of global NBC armaments through verifiable non-proliferation and arms control agreements.

- * Deter conventional attack on the American homeland as well as on those states or regions of vital political and economic significance to us; and, should deterrence fail, defend those same areas through military actions which will result in a termination of conflict on terms favorable to U.S. interests.

- * Maintain and, if necessary, defend the land, sea, air, and space lines of communication necessary for

unimpeded global commerce and the fulfillment of our worldwide security requirements.

- * Reduce the threat of international terrorism.

- * Reduce the flow of illicit drugs into the United States.

- * Maintain a robust, expansible industrial and mobilization base sufficient to support the aforementioned military objectives.

Of course, the articulation of objectives is merely the first step in the development of a full-blown national military strategy. Planners must also identify the concepts and resources -- the ways and means -- necessary to achieve these goals within the constraints and restrictions of the prevailing environment.

The Concepts and Resources of "Focused Engagement"

The Three Strategic Pillars. The "Focused Engagement" military strategy rests on three conceptual pillars: readiness, responsiveness, and resilience. Indeed, fulfillment of the six strategic military objectives demands:

* A superbly trained, equipped, and maintained joint force which is doctrinally, structurally, and materially ready to accomplish its assigned geographic or functional missions in a unilateral or coalition environment.

* A highly mobile and flexible joint force which can respond in a timely fashion to military contingencies ranging from peacetime engagements to regional hostilities to global nuclear war.

* An expansible joint force which husbands the nation's human, financial, and materiel resources and yet is resilient enough to reconstitute the nation's warfighting potential in times of crisis.

Together these three pillars provide both a solid foundation upon which to build a balanced military strategy and a touchstone by which America's leaders can judge the efficacy of the military establishment they create. Applied to the six specific strategic military objectives noted above, they allow American planners to complete the framing of a comprehensive and coherent "Focused Engagement" strategy. The remainder of this paper considers these six specific applications in general terms. It focuses on the major ways and means rather than on the details of force structure or budget priorities.

Seeing to NBC Deterrence. Today and for the foreseeable future, two significant trends will inevitably color the American strategist's perspectives on this key objective:

* Even if glasnost and perestroika succeed, even if the START I accord comes to pass, the Soviet Union will remain a continually modernizing nuclear superpower -- the only global actor capable of totally destroying the United States.

* The global proliferation of nuclear, biological, chemical, and ballistic missile technologies will dramatically alter the nature of the strategic challenge our nation and allies face. Recent CIA estimates suggest that by the turn of the century the U.S. could face a threat of mass destruction from virtually any quarter. Already, there are nine nuclear states, 15 Third World countries with chemical weapons programs, and 25 nations developing ballistic missiles.

To be ready, responsive, and resilient in this threatening environment, our strategy must focus on the development, deployment, and sustainment of appropriate offensive and defensive systems as well as on the complementary negotiation and implementation of prudent arms control and confidence building arrangements.

Specifically, the "Focused Engagement" strategy would emphasize the continued modernization of our nuclear triad and its control by a single unified Strategic Forces Command. It would sustain the proven concept of mutual assured destruction, but seek far greater stability and resilience by the deployment of mobile, single warhead ICBMs; a limited number of B-2 bombers; and the continued upgrading of a downscaled SSBN fleet.

In the arms control arena, "Focused Engagement" would emphasize the successful conclusion of an intrusively verifiable START Treaty, a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and ambitious follow-on accords designed to enhance the Soviets' positive, centralized control over their domestically vulnerable arsenal. It would also seek the negotiated, near-term elimination of artillery-delivered nuclear weapons in Europe. If augmented, as Senator Sam Nunn has suggested, by a "top-down" fail safe review in cooperation with the Soviets and accompanied by Nuclear Risk Reduction Center sponsored confidence-building measures, the strategy could yield a highly reliable -- but drastically reduced -- nuclear arsenal as well as enhanced mechanisms for crisis prevention and management.

But it is in the defensive domain that the proposed strategy entertains the greatest prospects for innovation. Here, readiness and responsiveness demand the development

and deployment of a mobile, ground-based anti-ballistic missile system for use by the regional CINCs. In the long term, increased resilience will necessitate the continued research and development of a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) system deployable in the eventuality that global ballistic missile proliferation places our interests in jeopardy. Such an approach maintains the quadruple advantage of respecting the letter and spirit of the ABM Treaty, using SDI as a high-leverage bargaining chip, maintaining flexibility in the face of increasing Soviet uncertainty, and positioning the U.S. on the moral high ground of moving from a deterrent to a defensive posture.

Seeing to Conventional Deterrence and Warfighting.

Just as in the nuclear arena, unpredictability and instability appear to be the only certainties on today's rapidly changing conventional stage. That's why U.S. decision-makers must not only stay focused on those countries and regions of critical strategic interest but also maintain forces ready to respond in a timely fashion to fast-breaking brush fire conflicts or long-smoldering regional conflagrations.

Certainly, the waning Soviet threat to Eurasia and the Third World will allow us to reduce our overall conventional force structure, but there is little likelihood of realizing a massive "peace dividend" in the foreseeable future.

Disorder in the wake of Soviet travail, if not disintegration, will demand scrupulous American vigilance. The modest economies we can effect will result from rationalizing our organizations, relying more heavily on our coalition partners, and taking advantage of high-technology systems which optimize combat power at acceptable levels of risk.

The heart of America's "Focused Engagement" conventional deterrence and warfighting approach will be downscaled unified commands in the Atlantic, Pacific, Middle Eastern, and Latin American regions. Each of these organizations will draw support from the sizeable reinforcing elements of a unified Contingency Command, the multifaceted lift potential of an enlarged unified Transportation Command, the communications and intelligence assets of a Space Command, and the unconventional capabilities of a highly specialized Special Operations Command.

Under the "Focused Engagement" approach, each regional CINC would prepare for the National Command Authority's approval a dynamic theater strategy designed to achieve those military objectives noted above. In doing so, the CINCs would seek operational readiness, responsiveness, and resilience by applying nine overarching principles:

* Intensive Intelligence -- The exploitation of an expanded all-source intelligence system designed to identify significant trends and maximize available warning time.

* Forward Presence -- The maintenance of minimum essential but rapidly expansible forward deployed forces which serve as tangible evidence of American resolve.

* Rapid Reinforcement -- The availability of ready forces, sufficient lift assets, and secure lines of communication to allow for the reinforcement of forward deployed forces within established "warning-response-warfighting" windows.

* Flexible Response -- The ability to project usable military power in a timely, organized fashion in response to a broad spectrum of possible peacetime and wartime contingencies and in accordance with a series of flexible joint operational plans.

* Coalition Integration -- The pre-hostility rationalization, standardization, and interoperability of forces; the equitable sharing of the burdens of collective defense; and the prudent use of multinational forces in those circumstances where unilateral American action is inappropriate.

* Battlefield Shaping -- The exploitation of security assistance, arms control agreements, confidence and security building measures, port and basing accords, and host nation support arrangements to create an environment conducive to the realization of American peacetime and wartime aims.

* Component Optimization -- The realignment of the division of labors between the Active (AC) and Reserve Components (RC) by placing heavier reliance on the AC for the generation of combat units and on the RC for the production of combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) units.

* Materiel Pre-Positioning -- The establishment of forward deployed unit sets of equipment, materiel, and ordnance as well as those logistics infrastructure assets necessary to meet the demands inherent in the established "warning-response-warfighting" windows.

* Technological Superiority -- The exploitation of knowledge and advanced systems to produce optimal deterrence and warfighting capability, reduce attendant risk, and minimize costs.

The net result of each CINC's application of these central guidelines should be an eclectic theater strategy which not only maximizes the readiness, responsiveness, and

resilience return on each dollar spent but also focuses our scarce resources on those tasks instrumental to the realization of the larger political objectives of the "New World Order" national security strategy. Take the Atlantic and Pacific Commands as cases in point.

Even in the Atlantic region where Yugoslavian fragmentation may presage a larger Soviet disintegration, America might substantially reduced its ground and maritime presence. Applying various "Focused Engagement" principles, the CINC Atlantic would strive to accomplish more with less by emphasizing:

- * Continued reliance on an updated NATO.
- * U.S. participation in multinational units at the corps level and below.
- * The eventual withdrawal of artillery-delivered tactical nuclear weapons.
- * Pursuing, in the absence of a recidivist Soviet threat, another round of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe negotiations to close some of the CFE I loopholes.
- * A much heavier reliance in all services on rapidly deployable AC combat and RC CS and CSS reinforcing organizations.

In the Pacific, there will be less substantial changes. The North Korean threat, continuing tensions in Southeast Asia, and Japan's unrelenting "pacifist mentality" will considerably attenuate the potential for dramatic force reductions. U.S. efforts at "coalition integration" will, of necessity, take a more bilateral cast; and American "battlefield shaping" endeavors will focus on solving the Cambodian problem, fostering stability in the Philippines, and promoting confidence and security building measures on the Korean Peninsula as a step toward ultimate unification.

The creation of a sizeable unified Contingency Command warrants particular comment. Charged with force generation and support of the regional commands, Contingency Command would also see to the defense of the continental United States and plan for military operations in all the unassigned regions of the world. Its limited AC and substantial RC ranks would include a full spectrum of heavy and light forces trained to deal with operations ranging from general warfare to low-intensity conflict. Its focus would be on what Senator Sam Nunn has termed "flexible readiness" as well as on practiced responsiveness. Its charter would allow for tremendous flexibility and innovation, especially in the maintenance of those RC organizations required for large-scale but improbable contingencies; and its commander would undoubtedly be the

foremost advocate of repairing America's Achilles' heel -- the nation's strategic lift shortfall.

Seeing to LOCs. The "New World Order" demands global openness, and worldwide openness necessitates the maintenance of unimpeded lines of communication. Observance of the principles of "intensive intelligence" and "forward presence" in the Atlantic, Pacific, Middle Eastern, and Latin American regions will be essential to free trade and stability, but ironically America's greatest concerns regarding its LOCs should focus on the strategic high ground miles overhead.

The space LOC may well be America's most inviting center of gravity in the 21st Century. Dislocation of U.S. space-based intelligence, communications, and command and control systems could prove lethal to the nation's warfighting capability and will. Here, the principles of "rapid reinforcement," "flexible response," and "coalition integration" take on special significance. And perhaps as in no other objective, "technological superiority" reigns king. At the bare minimum, America needs to continue to modernize its space fleet including the development and fielding of a resilient ASAT capability controlled, like all other space systems, by a unified Space Command.

Seeing to Terrorism. As counter-terrorism expert Brian Jenkins recently pointed out, the incidence of terrorism may have plateaued in the 1980s, but it still represents a real threat to American national interests. Responding to proven counter-measures, today's terrorist is merely shifting his aim. The "Focused Engagement" strategy addresses this unrelenting challenge by making it the central concern of the unified Special Operations Command whose CINC exploits the "intensive intelligence," "coalition integration," "rapid reinforcement," and "flexible response" principles to preclude or respond to terrorist lawlessness.

Seeing to Drug Trafficking. Narcotics trafficking has been a U.S. concern since the Opium Wars of the 19th Century. President Ronald Reagan quite rightly declared the increasing flow of illicit drugs a threat to American national security. The "Focused Engagement" strategy for dealing with this objective concentrates on stemming both demand and supply. The continentally-based Contingency Command would focus its efforts on the former objective by providing appropriate military support to civil anti-drug and border control agencies. In doing so, it would rely most heavily on the RC. In the supply interdiction arena, the small Latin America Command would take the lead. Exploiting the "intensive intelligence," "forward presence," and "battlefield shaping" principles, the CINC Latin America would conduct intensive, cooperative intelligence gathering

and distribution; provide host nation forces with training as well as CS and CSS; and engage in requested nation-building programs in order to address the underlining economic and social problems which plague so many of the drug-producing states. Moreover, the Special Operations Command would provide specialized support to the engaged "frontline" unified commands.

Seeing to the National Base. In his recent Parameters article, "Adjusting to Post-Cold War Strategic Realities," General George L. Butler observed that "the issue of mobilization represents the toughest problem we have as a nation in transitioning to a new strategic posture as the Cold War fades from center stage." He's absolutely right. The readiness and responsiveness of our standing unified commands can carry us only so far. Like our undefended space fleet and extremely limited strategic lift capabilities, the dwindling resilience of our national mobilization and industrial base may well be an inviting American center of gravity.

Under the "Focused Engagement" approach, the U.S. military would maintain the potential for graduated expansibility by relying on an enlarged, restructured, and revitalized RC. Although the most rapidly deployable RC organizations would be CS and CSS units, the Contingency Command's reserve base would also include flexibly ready RC

divisions, AC-led cadre formations, and a stand-by training establishment capable of generating the forces necessary to prosecute a global war.

Fulfillment of this final strategic objective will require the vigorous application of the principles of "intensive intelligence," "materiel pre-positioning," and "technological superiority." Strategic planners must seek maximum warning time, prudent investment in and pre-positioning of multiple unit sets of equipment, and sufficient warm-based production capabilities for critical high-tech ordnance. Moreover, the robustness of the industrial base will necessitate increased reliance on "fly-before-you-buy" acquisition strategies, programmed improvements to existing weapons systems, timely retirement of aging equipment, expanded emphasis on "leap ahead" research and development, and the implementation of a limited defense industrial policy -- a comprehensive framework for governmental investment, technology transfer, and offshore procurement.

Climbing into the New Strategic Ring

The renowned Prussian Marshal Helmuth Karl von Moltke, himself no stranger to the "Great Game" of Eurasian geopolitics, once remarked that for the strategist "the problem is to grasp ... the actual situation that is covered

by the mist of uncertainty, to appraise the facts correctly and to guess the unknown elements, to reach a decision quickly, and carry it out forcefully" Faced with the prospect of climbing into the misty ring of the 21st Century "Great Game," American strategists must grasp not only the essence of the President's "New World Order" vision but also the elusive realities of the dynamic global scene. They must project themselves into the future, take stock of what they see, and then consciously develop a strategic game plan which courts success at acceptable levels of cost and risk.

The "Focused Engagement" military strategy proposed in this paper is but one of many possible post-Cold War game plans. The author's hope is that, in addition to grappling with the uncertain future, it will also satisfy Moltke's definition of a great strategy -- "The application of knowledge to practical life, the development of an original idea in accordance with continually changing circumstances," -- and thereby provide the framework of a plan that will yield victory in the continuing "Great Game" of international competition.